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ABSTRACT

Teacher educators need to take the responsibility for providing future teachers with long-term evaluative skills necessary to select good literature. Educators must also take responsibility for modeling the powerful notion that books or literature aid in everyone's personal search for meaning. The process of analyzing literature is helpful in determining personal worth, and it is necessary for teacher education majors in determining professional worth for use with their future students. It is imperative that education majors understand the complex nature of literature as it aids each individual in a personal struggle for meaning. Students in a children's literature course need to spend time analyzing picture books and examining the possibilities of the psychoanalytical influence of fairy tales. In one course, a poetry unit precedes the introduction of children's and adolescent's novels. Students read five novels and also "A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature" (R. Luken, 1986) so that they may be aware of elements particular to children's literature. A second project at the end of the semester requires preservice teachers to compare and contrast two adolescent novels according to setting, point of view, style, characterization, and theme. By reading fewer books, students can analyze the many layers and shades of both personal and universal meaning inherent in children's books. (Twelve references are attached.) (MG)

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USING ANALYSIS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO CHALLENGE FUTURE TEACHERS

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In considering the curricular needs of a college course for future educators in children's literature, many decisions must be made. Given the time constraints of a semester, one critical decision in the development of this course is the trade-off between depth and breadth of coverage. Rather than have students read many novels, I have chosen to limit the course to five required novels. By utilizing this format of fewer novels, I am able to meet my goals of allowing students to evaluate literature both critically and personally and of allowing students to perceive literature as an experience which aids in the universal struggle for meaning in life. A strong rationale for creating such a children's literature course along with specific suggestions for designing this course will be made.

My concern, as the professor of a Literature for Children and Adolescents course, is that we take responsibility for providing future teachers with long-term evaluative skills necessary to select good literature rather than the discrete knowledge of all quality children's books published until the semester they take a children's literature course. Furthermore, we must take responsibility for modelling the powerful notion that books or literature aid in everyone's personal search for meaning. Many of my college students, sadly enough, have yet to discover that literature is not just words printed across a page. Literature, like any art form, speaks to us about the

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meaning of life. And when this discovery is made, my students' enthusiasm for discussion and for continued reading abounds.

Often, courses in children's literature taken by education majors are organized as survey courses, with the ultimate goal to expose students to as many books as possible. In many cases, this focus on breadth of coverage severely limits the degree to which students may explore the depths of great literature. For, as Northrup Frye (1964) concludes:

> In literature, we have both a theory and a practice. The practice is the production of literature... The theory is what I mean by criticism, the activity of uniting literature with society, and with the different contexts that literature itself has... The great bulk of criticism is teaching, at all levels from the kindergarten to graduate schools. (pp. 127-128)

Literature courses must teach criticism of literature or analysis of literature or the "experience" of literature, not literature. The process of analyzing literature is helpful in determining personal worth and it is necessary for teacher education majors in determining professional worth for use with their future students. Using literary criticism to interact with print as well as in discussion with other readers creates an in-depth experience with literature. This experience moves students, many for the first time, to consider books as more than summaries, synopses, and book reports.

In the beginning, some of my college students are convinced that literature exists for the sole purpose of torturing them. However, literature exists because humans are intuitively involved in the struggle to make meaning out of the apparent chaos and arbitrariness of their lives. It is imperative that education majors understand the complex nature of literature as it aids each of us in our personal struggle for meaning.

In Bruno Bettelheim's Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales, the basic premise is that at least one form of traditional literature remains alive because "...our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives (pg. 3)." Further, Bettelheim (1976) acknowledges the demands for literature, based upon human need:

> ...it must stimulate his imagination, help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions, be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems that perturb him (p. 5).

Similarly, Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers (1988) examines another form of traditional literature in The Power of the Myth, although Campbell redefines the search for the meaning of life as being rooted in the search for the experience of being alive. Both of these scholars have shown themselves to be keenly aware of the link between the complex nature of literature (even seemingly "simple" literature) and its important contributions in our personal struggle for meaning.

From his professional experiences as a Viennese psychologist and from his life experiences as a survivor of WWII death camps, Viktor Frankl (1984) developed logotherapy. Logotherapy is the idea of therapy through the ongoing, never-ending quest for meaning. Frankl (Fabry, 1980, pp. xiv-xix) suggests there are five areas of meaning:

1. Situations in which we discover a truth about ourselves (even vicarious experiences)
2. Situations in which we see choices, limited as they may be (learning from past experience).
3. Situations in which we experience our uniqueness (personal relationships and artistic activities).
4. Situations requiring responsibility.
5. Situations requiring "self-transcendence."

If we accept a definition of reading as an active and creative process and one that utilizes our past experiences, the first, second, and third areas of meaning - making are especially important. Not surprising to us, Frankl feels education can play a major part in guiding the young to find meaning. Although experts have not made direct links between the two, I certainly perceive bibliotherapy as subset of

logotherapy. Once again literature is viewed not as content to be taught, but as an experience of making meaning.

Michael Steig's (1989) new book, Stories of Reading, contains a great account of Marian's very personal response to Wuthering Heights (p. 58). Likewise, it does not take my students long to make the very lucid discovery that Where the Wild Things Are or Charlotte's Web holds meaning for their lives today. When this serendipitiously happens as we explore and critically evaluate themes, I find the education majors ripe for accepting Louise Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory of literature which states, "This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his experience, to be reflected at any angle important to him as a human being (pp. 12)." The transactional theory of literature accepts the experiencing of literature as a coming-together where past experiences and present personality plus present interest and preoccupation impact upon the meaning derived.

"The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader (Rosenblatt, 1978, pp. 12-13)." Students are refreshed and relieved by such statements. As readers, they are truly empowered by Rosenblatt because her theory allows their critical evaluations and personal interpretations to be validated or legitimized.

The syllabus for this course reflects the rationale and goals which have been previously discussed. At the beginning of the course, we spend about two weeks studying and discovering how initial literacy concerns may change our definition of reading through discussing seminal articles by Frank Smith and Yetta Goodman. Then, as my students read twenty fairy tales, they spend about two weeks unravelling the complexities presented in selections by Bruno Bettelheim from The Uses of Enchantment. By examining the possibilities of the psychoanalytical influences of fairy tale, on very young children, preservice teachers begin to see the tremendous power literature may possess. From here, our class spends approximately three weeks reading and analyzing many picture books. In class, we more closely examine about five

picture books (Goodnight Moon, The Story of Ferdinand, Where the Wild Things Are, The Giving Tree, and The Polar Express, for example) according to the following literary elements: characterization, point of view, use of language or style, quality of illustrations, format, and the integration of illustrations and text. We also concern ourselves with possible themes and theme statements as well as symbolism.

Students are required to analyze critically two books: a quality picture book of their choice and a cheaper, grocery store book according to the literary elements discussed in class. Next, a poetry unit beginning with children's natural love of rhyme and rhythm as well as their preferences for humorous poetry and moving through the genres of poetry for children precedes the introduction of children's and adolescents' novels.

In designing this children's literature course, I have chosen to limit the reading requirements in order to allow for greater analysis and contemplation. Although we read many selections of folktales, picture books, and poetry, I selected only five children's books: Charlotte's Web, Bridge to Terabithia, A Solitary Blue, A Wrinkle in Time, and Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. These five books were chosen so that clear comparisons and contrasts among them could be made. While I assume students possess the technical vocabulary of story structure and stylistic devices, I require them to read R. Luken's (1986) A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature so that they may be aware of these elements particular to children's literature. Many times in small groups, I require students to create story diagrams (maps, webs, models, schemas) or to create T-grids contrasting characters such as Jesse and Aaron in Bridge to Terabithia or the Professor and Melody in A Solitary Blue. I ask students to make lists of all the similes used by Katherine Paterson in Bridge to Terabithia and to discover any common threads or patterns in all of these which might relate to setting or theme. Students are requested to analyze the dialogue in Mildred Taylor's Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry for similar common patterns in order to perceive the effectiveness of her style. We spend many hours in small group and large group

discussions extracting and distilling meaningful themes found in each book. For example, I ask students to find what persons, places, or incidents in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry exemplify the theme of independence, of family relationships, and of friendship. Small groups struggle to create lists of theme statements related to love, mental health or family relations which one could derive from each book. And throughout the course, all the students learn more about themselves and more about each other and more about their perceptions of a universal order or of the meaning of life.

A second project at the end of the semester requires preservice teachers to compare and contrast two adolescent novels according to setting, point of view, style, characterization, and theme. These two novels may be either by the same author or may be concerned with the same theme, such as sexuality, divorce, or racism.

Glenna Sloan's (1984) excellent resource, The Child As Critic, is wonderful for sharing with preservice teachers to show them that teaching literature is actually teaching criticism of literature, regardless of the age of the audience. Her book contains a useful listing of the kinds of literary understandings preschool, primary and middle grade students can develop. Once shared, my students certainly understand that the very kinds of tasks modelled and performed in this class can be successful with their future students.

Thus, with fewer books, students can analyze the many layers and shades of both personal and universal meaning inherent in good children's books. Alan Purves and Dianne Monson (1984) add this salient point:

> Our experience, what we have done, what we have seen, what we have read, separate us. At the same time, the text brings us together and gives us a chance to explore how we resemble each other and how we differ from each other (p. 8).

This beautiful perspective of literature has the power not only to strengthen the intellectual and aesthetic development of our preservice teachers, but their perspective will serve as a worthy model for their own transactions between literature and future students in our public schools.

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a strong rationale for designing a children's literature course for education majors that requires students to evaluate literature critically and utilize Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literature rather than the traditional survey courses where breadth over depth is stressed. This paper also outlines specific books, possible resources, and examples of learning experiences that one can use to challenge future teachers by exploring the depths of children's literature.